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Adult Protective Services



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Definition

Adult Protective Services (APS) is a social services program aimed at promoting safety, independence, and quality of life for vulnerable adults who are in danger or victims of abuse, neglect (by self or others), or exploitation (ANE).

Overview

APS originated in mid-twentieth-century America out of concern among community leaders in urban centers for the growing number of older people living alone, without nearby family support, often mentally compromised, and potentially subjected to harm without assistance. The program rapidly spread across the country due to impetus and funding from Title XX of the Social Security Act, now part of the Social Service Block Grant (Mixson 2010). Today, APS is the only program dedicated to addressing the mistreatment of vulnerable adults nationwide.

APS has four core functions: it receives and investigates ANE reports or referrals; assesses client status and service needs; arranges and coordinates or provides services to prevent or treat harm; and seeks legal intervention in the form of surrogate decision-making authority for the incapacitated adult or criminal penalty for the abuser. Anyone can make a report, and presently every state, except New York, has mandatory reporting provisions in its APS or vulnerable adult abuse reporting law, thereby requiring all or specified persons (such as law enforcement or health care professionals) to report known or suspected situations of ANE to APS, or face possible financial or other penalty for not reporting.

Once a report of ANE is received, APS determines if it qualifies for investigation. Investigation often includes interviews with the alleged victim, abuser (if applicable), and collaterals. If the alleged ANE is substantiated, services to address the situation are identified and offered. Adult victims of ANE have the right to decline services, unless a court deems them to be incapacitated. Commonly provided services include advocacy with other systems and various in-home and community services. To foster coordinated service delivery, APS often works through multidisciplinary teams. Multidisciplinary teams exist in many communities to better facilitate recognition and response to situations of vulnerable adult mistreatment than could be handled by any discipline or organization alone. Some of these teams are formed by local APS